DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 964 SE 046 056

AUTHOR Gump, Paul V.
TITLE An Environmental Perspective on Classroom Order.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (69th, Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Organization; *Classroom Environment; *Classroom Techniques; Discipline; Educational Environment; Physical Environment; *Student Behavior; Teaching Conditions; Time Management; Time on Task
IDENTIFIERS Synomorphy

ABSTRACT

This document offers perspectives on the concepts of environment and order related to the classroom setting. Environment is explained as the physical milieu, action structure, and the fit between these phenomena. Order can refer to the system being "in order" or to the participants being on task. Examples are presented of relationships between milieu factors and order, and between variations in action structure and order. Transitions between activities and simultaneous operation of activities are related to order. The current status and future direction of research in classroom order is also discussed. (Author/ML)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED262964

Abstract of: An Environmental Perspective on Classroom Order

Paul V. Gump

Presented are the ideas that environment includes: physical milieu, action structure, and the fit between these phenomena; that order can refer to the system being "in order" or to participants being on-task. Examples are presented of relationships between milieu factors and order, and between variations in action structure and order. Transitions between activities and simultaneous operation of activities are related to order. Comments regarding the place of environmental research in relation to the educational enterprise close the presentation.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Paul V. Gump

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SE 046 056

An Environmental Perspective on Classroom Order[1]

Paul V. Gump
University of Kansas

We can start by focusing upon two words in our title: First, environment: Classroom things and events cluster into small settings such as the morning opening, the reading circle, the social studies discussion and so on. In this perspective, these small bounded segments have a physical milieu and an action structure, a standing pattern of behavior. The milieu of the reading circle has a site, a seating arrangement, certain behavior objects. The action structure of the reading circle includes reading-in-turn, discussion of story issues, perhaps some question-and-answer drill on phonics or the like. Milieu and action pattern manifest an essential similarity of shape, or a synomorphy. The action pattern in the reading circle "needs" a milieu shape which enables protected, direct, close-up communication. The milieu thus provides for an out-of-the-way location, inwardly oriented chairs, a focal location of the teacher and of any visual displays. The environment we are considering consists of a physical milieu, an action pattern and a fittedness between milieu and action or program.

The general concept of environment just described is well explicated by Barker (1968); its application to school classrooms is described by Gump (1969).

Secondly, in our title we have the word order. At one level, order is simple: It is the degree of conformity of participants: their being on-task, not being deviant. This definition, used in most research, is limited in focus not recognizing that the system--the setting cluster that these participants inhabit--can itself be "down" or out-of-order. For most spans of classroom activity, we can recognize what opportunities are being offered and what the appropriate environmental conditions for these opportunities would be. Yet, it is common experience that these conditions often are not maintained. Thoughtful discussion of a social issue is interrupted by a trumpeting loudspeaker, pupil attention is drawn away from arithmetic by the repeated entrances and exits of students on special schedules; and so on. More persistent disorders in the system occur for those situations which require participants to wait for materials

---

[1] Revision of a presentation at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Chicago, April 1985.

or signals which are not forthcoming. Such a condition often prevails at transition from one activity to another. These phases of classroom events can require from 20 to 30% of the child's classroom day. In one of our analyses as to why transitions took so much time, the most frequent cause related to teachers being unprepared to begin the second activity. Children were ready to be on-task, the classroom system was off-task.

In the classroom reality, system order and pupil behavior order become intertwined. Still, the two ideas are clearly separate and one needs to be aware of each in attempts to describe, diagnose, or influence classroom order.

With these reflections on the concepts of environment and order stated, we can turn to consideration of how aspects of milieu and of action structure or program relate to order. Space permits only a pointing at certain issues; more thorough and more data-supported analyses will be available in the Gump reference (in press) and are now accessible in the other references cited.

With regard to milieu and order, a brief but excellent introduction is provided by Weinstein (1981) who makes two points especially pertinent to our perspective here.

(1) Milieu effects upon participants can be direct or symbolic. If a row-and-column seating arrangement makes pupil-to-pupil interaction difficult, this would be a direct effect. If such a seating arrangement conveys to pupils that the teacher really doesn't want much of her recommended "open discussion among ourselves," this would be a symbolic effect.

(2) The effects of given physical provisions and arrangements are not general but highly dependent upon their instructional context.

Row-and-column seating can work well for individual study effort but seating around a table enhances possibilities of cooperative effort. The idea that milieu and program must fit--and that a kind of disorder and reordering occurs if they don't--was researched on open design classrooms (Gump & Ross, 1979). Open design or open milieu schools attempted either very traditional or relatively open instructional programs. When an open milieu was provided for traditional programs, a dissonance developed. If the system was to continue, either the milieu or the program would have to change.

This ecological "need" for milieu and program to come to terms could be seen as a press toward synomorphy. In most cases where schools' open milieu was not

synomorphic with traditional action structures, staff reduced physical openness by introduction of barriers: plywood walls, file cabinets, book cases, or commercially developed dividers on wheels. In a few cases, teachers of traditional action structures were prevented by central office from making such adjustment. One measure of the tension thus created was that teacher dissatisfaction with their physical milieu was significantly highest for the prevented teachers. (On the other hand, milieu satisfaction was greatest for teachers operating relatively open programs in the open design classrooms.)

We have anecdotal evidence that the program-milieu dissonance and the resulting press toward synomorphy can also operate to change programs. For example, teachers in newly created open designs recounted the activities given up in the new surroundings because these activities created problems for adjacent learning settings. Where several classes shared a large open space, class-wide discussions were avoided since voices loud enough to be heard across the discussing class could also be heard in the other classes. Sounds from movies and tape recordings similarly spread to other classes; these disturbances were avoided by eliminating the movies and recordings. The open design school is often not as noisey as its critics claimed it would be. Instead, reductions in program flexibility and richness have made its noise level acceptable. Such an outcome suggests that environmental costs must often be paid for certain classroom order. These costs, these losses in environmental diversity or opportunity, should be included in our evaluations of classroom order.

Let us turn now to a consideration of how action structures or programs can be related to issue of classroom order. First, it is important to recognize that these structures are--in this perspective--just as environmental as the physical milieu with which they are joined. For example, a child entering an academic game enters an action arena where behaviors are prescribed. The action structures become sources of independent variables influencing on-task behavior. The action structure of many academic games involve persistent and demanding external stimulation or signals. Pupil conformance is usually higher here than in those structures for which external signals are intermittent and passive. Teacher-led recitations are examples of action structures with relatively active and persistent external guiding stimuli, in contrast, most of seatwork depends upon passive external guides and internally generated forward movement. Other things being

equal, teacher recitations gain better conformance than seatwork. How various action structures affect participant involvement and deviancy in nursery school has been well described by Kounin and Sherman (1979). Similar ideas for elementary school have been proposed by Gump (1982) and Berliner (1983).

Just as the input or signals of action structures can be characterized as active or passive, so may the response requirements of a structure be described. Work by Hall and others (1982) demonstrates how pupil behavior and learning can be improved if--to use their concept--the action structure provides "opportunity to respond."

Not only do prevailing programs or action structures shape input and response conditions, they prescribe the action relationship among participants. Some action structures say "behave privately" as in traditional seatwork, others require the interlocking of participant behaviors as in the cooperative formats described by Bossert (1979) and Slavin (1983). The social gains enabled by the more cooperative, less individualistic activity formats are reported by these and other investigators. Clearly, action interdependence can yield social connectedness.

The cooperative formats are not irrelevant to the issue of order. Whenever, children in school are told to interact with one another as opposed to interacting with a single, task-competent person (i.e., a teacher), some vulnerability to disorder obtains. In group formats, pupils must track shifting input sources and must sort between task-appropriate and task inappropriate stimulations. The challenge to maintain focus is intrinsically more difficult in the group situation. On-task ratings for group activities are sometimes lower than for individual activities. For example, in nursery school, individual craft projects yielded higher task involvement than group projects (Kounin & Gump, 1974; Kounin & Sherman, 1979)

The foregoing discussion of interdependent structures deals only with the intrinsic discrimination difficulty of the group situation. Pupils may be well motivated to participate and succeed in the group activity and they may be quite capable of making discriminating responses to the mixed social input. In such circumstances, pupil involvement in group projects should be relatively high.

Classroom order can be shaped by the qualities of activities, order is also influenced by relationship between these settings. Transitions between activities exhibit marked changes in both teacher and pupil behavior. Teacher action becomes

more directive and counter-deviant; pupil behavior may--if there are not counter-acting arrangements--lose task focus, become more deviant. This problem and pertinent ideas and references can be found in Gump, 1969 and Gump, in press.

A second relationship between activities or classroom settings occurs when several operate simultaneously. In a typical case in elementary school, the teacher's continuous input is required in Setting A (e.g., leading the reading circle while Setting B (e.g., seatwork) is expected to proceed without teacher assistance. However, Setting B may make claims on the teacher; to the extent that the teacher immediately satisfies these claims, Setting A is left without the necessary input. Off-task behavior in Setting A usually follows (Gump, 1982).

As indicated by the last example, certain classroom environments are more vulnerable to disorder than others. The implication is not, necessarily, that such environments should be eliminated; rather, their construction and maintenance require recognition of the vulnerability and counter measures to reduce it.

Enough has been said to lay out an environmental perspective on issues of classroom order. Much more specific, even practical, information is available in the references. At this point, rather than summarize what is itself a summary, I would like to close with several assertions concerning environmental research in relation to the larger endeavor of pedagogical research.

First. The amount of research relevant to this perspective has increased substantially in recent years. I undertook to write a comprehensive chapter on this topic (Gump, in press) and found about 180 useable references.

Second. Findings are not becoming as cumulative as their number would suggest. A major hindrance is the tendency to use different lyrics to the same environmental music. For example, in an excellent and comprehensive chapter, Stodolsky (1984) deals with what are labelled "instructional work groups." These are really little classroom settings with their own places, props, and action structures. To label these phenomena "groups" is to minimize their environmental status in favor of making them all 'social." Dr. Stodolsky is well aware of this labelling problem since she has presented a major work on classroom settings--but it seemed necessary to cast the material in lyrics (words) consistent with the rest of the volume to which she contributed. Doyle (in press and private communication) noted that use of different concepts for what may be the same phenomena makes summations of our knowledge in this area difficult, maybe impossible.

Third. The environmental approach outlined here is not to be seen as an alternative to other approaches. At base, the environment is a continuing and highly coercive aspect of education. Its provision and maintenance are absolutely essential. One may decide to deal with it on common sense or intuitive levels rather than with the help of research and theory but one cannot legitimately say, for example, "I will use a behavior modification approach (or a social learning approach) instead of an environmental one." The question instead is whether, in our inevitable and continuous dealing with the environment, we will depend upon practitioner lore or will demand that research data inform our educational efforts.

Fourth. Just as concern for school and classroom environments is absolutely necessary, this concern is also absolutely insufficient in deciding upon educational aims. Environmental understandings don't tell us what our larger educational visions should be: What curricula should be offered? What learning outcomes should be sought? These are issues beyond the scope of environmental understanding. They are issues that other presenters for this symposium will consider.

As a last word, however, I would maintain that to achieve our educational visions, we need to be as smart as possible about their environmental implementation.

References

What environment are we talking about?

In General

Barker, R. G. (1968). Ecological psychology. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Chapter 2, "The ecological environment."

For Schools

Gump, P. V. (1969). Intra-setting analysis: The third grade classroom as a special but instructive case. In E. Willems and H. Raush (Eds.), Naturalistic viewpoints in psychological research. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Gump, P. V. (in press). School and classroom environments. In A. Altman and D. Stokols (Eds.), Handbook of environmental psychology. New York: Wiley.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

On Milieu Aspects of Environment

Gump, P. V., & Ross, R. (1979). What's happening in schools of open design? JSAS Catalogue of Selected Documents in Psychology, 9:12, 1816.

Weinstein, C. S. (1981). Classroom design as an external condition for learning. Educational Technology, 21(8), 12-19.

On Program Aspects of Environment

Berliner, C. D. (1983). Developing conception of classroom environments: Some light on the T in classroom studies of ATI. Educational Psychologist, 18i, (1), 1-13.

Bossert, S. T. (1979). Tasks and social relationships in classrooms. (A study of instructional organization and its consequences.) New York: Cambridge University Press.

Doyle, W. (in press). Classroom organization and management. In M. Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Gump, P. V. (1982). School settings and their keeping. In D. Duke (Ed.), Helping teachers manage classrooms. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Hall, V. R., Delquardi, J., Greenwood, C. R., & Thurston, L. (1982). The importance of opportunity to respond in children's academic success. In E. Edgar, N. Haring, J. Jenkins and C. Piores (Eds.), Mentally handicapped children: Education and training (pp. 107-140). Baltimore: University Park Press.

Kounin, J. S., & Gump, P. V. (1974). Signal systems of lesson settings and the task-related behavior of pre-school children. Journal of Educational Psychology, 66, 554-562.

Kounin J. S., & Sherman, L. W. (1979). School environments as behavior settings. Theory into Practice, 13, 145-151.

Slavin, R. E. (1983). Cooperative learning. New York: Longman.

Stodolsky, S. S. (1984). Frameworks for studying instructional processes in peer work-groups. In P. L. Peterson, L. C. Wilkinson and M. Hallinan (Eds), The social context of instruction. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

BEST COPY